

ON THE BEAT

*Minneapolis VA Health
Care System*

Vikings Meet Veterans

See Page 5



November/December 2012



Artist's renderings of parking ramp (above) and future connector to medical center (below).



Parking Ramp Approved; Work Begins In Spring 2013

With the start of parking ramp construction in spring 2013, an estimated 233 surface spaces located in front of the Minneapolis VA medical center must be vacated for the “construction zone.” For 18 months, heavy construction equipment and materials will be on site. The ramp, costing nearly \$10 million, will consist of 520 spaces with a net increase of 293 spots as a result of displacement of surface parking. The facility will have four levels (including ground) with future vertical expansion possible for two more levels. A committee headed by Chief Engineer Steve Challeen with membership of the unions, police and human resources has been evaluating alternative parking options. That plan will soon be announced. In the meantime, staff members are strongly encouraged to use alternative transportation – light rail, buses, car pools, van pools, biking (in good weather). The ramp will be for patients only during regular hours.

How do YOU get to work? Many Options Available for VA Staff

- To join the **Transit Benefit Program**, contact Chris Sam in HR at ext. 7304.
- Metro Transit Rideshare and van pools, see <http://metrotransit.org/rideshare-carpool.aspx>
- Bus routes and light rail, see <http://metrotransit.org/>
- To view a public service video about how VA employees use alternative transportation, see <http://vaww.minneapolis.va.gov/Newsroom/videos/transportation2012.asp>
- For telework eligibility, contact HR or your supervisor.
- Try biking. Lottery held in spring by Wellness Is Now (WIN) program for 64 bike lockers.

ON THE BEAT is a publication of the Public Affairs Office of the Minneapolis VA Health Care System, One Veterans Drive, Minneapolis, MN 55417. **ON COVER** – Minnesota Vikings Center John Sullivan chats with Veteran in the Spinal Cord Injury/Disorder Center. (Photo by April Eilers, Medical Media).

Southern Minnesota VA Clinic Gets Go-Ahead

Planning for a new U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in southern Minnesota is underway. The Minneapolis VA Health Care System (VAHCS) has received approval from its regional administrative office, Veterans Integrated Service Network 23, to open a new CBOC somewhere in the southeast Minnesota border area, tentatively in late 2013 or early 2014.

The planning process involves a detailed demographic survey of underserved Veterans. That information will help VA determine the best location of the future clinic. CBOCs are strategically located to serve the most Veterans by reducing travel times.

CBOCs offer primary health care services and mental health counseling, sometimes through video teleconferencing from the clinic to a clinician located at the medical center in Minneapolis. The clinics do not provide urgent care or emergency care.

"Outpatient clinics are key to providing Veterans better access to high-quality care closer to home," said **Dr. Clyde Markon**, medical director of the Minneapolis VA's current network of 11 outpatient clinics in Minnesota and western Wisconsin. "By reducing the distance Veterans have to travel, we hope more Veterans will benefit from the health care services they have earned through their service to our nation."

The new clinic in southern Minnesota will be a contract clinic, which means a private organization will operate the facility and provide staff through a lease arrangement with the Minneapolis VAHCS. A location has not been determined. The solicitation for bids is expected to be posted on federal business opportunities website (www.fbo.gov) within six months. The solicitation will contain details on the delineated area, clinic size, parking and other services that must be included in the project.

Minneapolis VAHCS currently operates outpatient clinics in Rochester, Mankato, Saint James, Hibbing, Cook, Maplewood and Ramsey, MN; and Chippewa Falls, Rice Lake, Hayward and Superior, WI.

Plans Moving Ahead for Housing Project at Historic Fort Snelling

CommonBond Communities, a non-profit in St. Paul, is teaming up with Minneapolis VA to renovate several old buildings at the Fort Snelling Upper Post for housing for homeless veterans and their families. CommonBond plans to develop 58 units; most will be small efficiencies. The buildings were originally constructed in early 1900s. A public hearing will be held January 23 at 6 p.m. at the medical center to allow stakeholders to comment on the project. The renovation effort is part of a nationwide VA program to provide more than 3,000 units of housing at 25 VA medical centers.

Maplewood CBOC Moving to New Location In Early 2013; Larger Space to Serve Veterans

The new home of the expanded Maplewood Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) will open in early 2013. The building is located at the northeast corner of Kennard Street and Legacy Parkway in Maplewood, MN, a suburb northeast of downtown St. Paul. The 14,000 square foot building is twice the size of current clinic, which opened in 1999, on White Bear Avenue. The new lease was awarded to MSP Commercial for a period of 10 years. Services will include primary care, behavioral health and specialty telemedicine. The clinic will also be equipped with a laboratory and radiology equipment. Maplewood CBOC provides care for more than 3,400 veterans. Information about a dedication and public tour will be announced soon; Check the Minneapolis VA website for details.

MINNEAPOLIS VA STAFF NEWS



Dr. Fu

Steven Fu, MD, Named Director of Center for Chronic Disease Outcomes Research; National Expert on Tobacco Cessation

Dr. Fu is an Associate Professor of Medicine at the University of Minnesota Medical School. He earned his MD degree in 1996 at Jefferson Medical College, and completed a residency in Internal Medicine at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia in 1999. He then completed a General Internal Medicine Fellowship and obtained a Master of Science degree in Clinical Epidemiology from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. In 2001, he moved to Minneapolis to join CCDOR and has been a core investigator in the University of Minnesota's Tobacco Research Center. Since June 2012, Dr. Fu has served as the acting director of CCDOR. Dr. Fu is a nationally recognized expert in tobacco cessation and health disparities. He is a leader in the treatment of tobacco dependence among diverse racial/ethnic minority groups and among our nation's veterans.



Dr. Nichol

Kristin Nichol, MD, Named Primary and Subspecialty Medicine PSL Director; Recently Served as Chief of Research

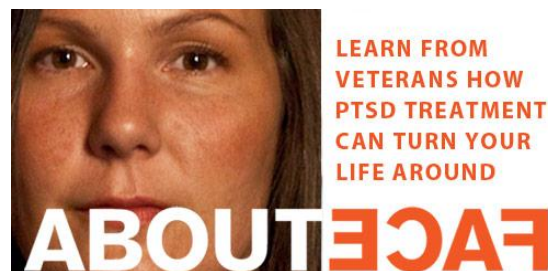
Dr. Nichol has served as acting PSL director since October 1, 2012. Dr. Nichol completed her undergraduate training at St. Olaf College and her medical school training at the University of Minnesota. She received her MPH degree also from the University of Minnesota and her MBA degree from the University of St. Thomas. Dr. Nichol pursued internal medicine residency training at the University of California in San Francisco as well as the University of Minnesota. After serving as Chief Medical Resident at the Minneapolis VA, she joined the medical staff in 1985. She has held several positions here including Chief of General Internal Medicine, Chief of Medicine Director of the Primary Care PSL, and most recently Associate Chief of Staff for Research (ACOS/Research). Boarded in internal medicine and general preventive medicine, she is a professor of medicine at the University of Minnesota.



Dickson

Jacob Dickson Named Director of Prosthetics; Previously Worked at New Orleans VA, Served in U.S. Marines

Previously, Dickson served for four and a half years as the Director of Prosthetics and Sensory Aids Service and the Assistant Director, Acquisitions and Materiel Management Service at the New Orleans VA. Before joining the VA in 2008, he served 7 years active duty in the U.S. Marine Corps. His duty stations were: Quantico, VA, Beaufort, SC, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Washington, D.C. A native of Memphis, TN, he is a graduate of Austin Peay State University and the University of New Orleans.



Watch their stories at www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/AboutFace/

Vikings Meet Veterans On Election Day

Five Members of the Minnesota Vikings, a member of the cheerleading squad and mascot “Viktor” visited the medical center on Nov. 8. The visit was co-sponsored by the VFW and United Healthcare, which donated a bike to Voluntary & Community Services. Here’s what the players said of the visit:

- Backup QB McLeod Thompson-Bethel – “It’s an amazing and humbling experience to be around these veterans.”
- Defensive tackle Christian Ballard – “Thank you for our freedom; thank you for your service. Both my mother and father were in the Air Force. I know what it means to serve.”
- Center John Sullivan, who has visited the VA for three years in a row – “It’s a privilege to be here and thank the people who sacrificed for us.”
- Linebacker Marvin Mitchell (left photo) – “They are the true heroes of our country. It’s great to be around them and talk with them and hear their stories.”

Also visiting was wide receiver Jerome Simpson (lower left photo).



News from Recent Employee Forums

- **Acting Director Judy Johnson-Mekota** announced that a nomination package for a candidate for permanent director of the medical center has gone forward from the VISN to VACO. She estimated it would take four to six months before the permanent director is on board. She also reported:
 - The budget picture for the next fiscal year is good. She said the goal moving forward is to align resources with the health care needs of Veterans.
 - During her two months at the Minneapolis VA, she said she has observed the need for improved communications internally, particularly related to action items and “suspenses” as well as overall communication of information.
- **Nurse Executive Helen Pearlman** reported that the Minneapolis falls initiative has resulted in improved performance and a significant reduction in patient falls. She also reported:
 - She reported plans to locate “tele-techs” permanently in a single location to allow faster response to alarms.
 - On the topic of nurse staffing, she said staffing had increased steadily in FY13 after a decrease of 60 in FY12. Current FTE is 922.
- **Chief of Staff Kent Crossley, MD**, indicated a search is underway for a deputy chief of staff and head of Specialty Care to replace Dr. Rod Barke who retires in early 2013. He also reported:
 - Minneapolis will become the site of a VISN pain management program.
 - Leadership is working closely with other sites in the VISN to be more responsible as a referral site. Meetings with the St. Cloud VA have been held every several months in 2012 and have greatly facilitated transfers in both directions. Minneapolis leaders are working on developing a similar relationship with the Fargo VA.
 - A new CBOC will open later this year or early 2014 in Southern Minnesota just above the Minnesota/Iowa border (See Page 3). A new location for our CBOC in Maplewood will open in early 2013 (See Page 3). CBOCs in Chippewa Falls and Hayward, WI, may be expanded.
 - Minneapolis is working hard to improve effectiveness with its academic partner – the University of Minnesota Medical School - in ways related to both education and teaching.
- **Associate Director Erik Stalhandske** provided a review of the All Employee Survey, noting areas where Minneapolis VA excelled compared with 31 other VA A1 facilities, and a few areas where Minneapolis VA could improve when compared with its peers.
 - Supervisors and managers are holding meetings with their staffs to review detailed findings. Results located in “Q” Drive – in folder: “**All Employee Survey-AES Results - 2012 KEEP**”
- **Staff from the Education Service** reported on the new policies and procedures for conferences. Conferences that cost \$20,000-\$100,000 or have 50 or more participants require national approval. Local approval for under \$20,000 and fewer than 50 participants. For details, see <http://vaww.ees.lrn.va.gov/Conferences/Guidance>
- **Chief Engineer Steve Challeen** provided update on plans for parking ramp (see Page 2 for details).

Q&A FROM EMPLOYEE FORUMS

Why did some staff lose their annual retention bonuses? A change in VA policy ended local control.


Will there be a Cost-of-Living increase next year? There is still a freeze on the national level.

Will there be employee performance awards this year? Yes.

What are we doing about waste? We have an active Green Environmental Management System (GEMS) program. We recycle large amounts of food waste. Contact coordinator George Johnson with new ideas.

Why isn't there a break room for housekeeping staff? Matter will be discussed and options explored between Engineering, the Associate Director and the Chief, EMS.

There is lack of IT support for off hours and Saturdays. IT has only 26 staff and has devoted staff to major projects during regular work week. If there is a problem, contact AOD who will contact IT on off-tours.

There are long delays in filing Help Desk tickets. Many staff don't know how and they are frustrated. There is an icon on the desktop for filling out the help ticket. Here's icon 

Since recent power outage, we have more network issues. The two issues are not connected. New server system is being installed to help improve network communication.

The grade to the parking areas is too steep. The slope of the ramp will meet all design criteria. The surface of the ramp will have a rough surface to improve traction. The ramps were relocated inboard during design to protect against blowing snow.

How are you going to promote car and van pools? We have had 5 transportation fairs and will do more.

How many car pool spots in new plan? 66. If there is more demand, we will assign additional spaces.

What about parking on 46th Street ? Parking is not allowed because of Memorandum of Understanding with the City of Minneapolis and community. In addition, our goal is to be a good neighbor within this community.

Will there be a shuttle to Fort Snelling remote lot during construction? This option will be reviewed.

How will we help veterans find their way in new parking ramp? Design will seek to develop a system that is intuitive to drivers. There will be signage and security cameras to identify lost veterans.

Can you talk with Metro Transit about free use of light rail from 28th Street station? Chief engineer has raised this issue with Metro Transit and was initially turned down. He will approach them again.

Why did we apply asphalt when a new parking garage is coming? Patching the asphalt was no longer effective due to a poor sub base so we removed all of the old asphalt, rebuilt the sub base and placed new asphalt. It should last for 20 years. Because of loss of parking spaces during garage construction, we wanted to repair existing lots before the ramp started to minimize impact during ramp construction.

Can there be more tele-commuting? Depends on work assignment and supervisor approval.

Why are doctors parking in general employee lot when they have their own? Gated lot has 120 spaces but more than 700 members of the medical staff are allowed to park there.

Has there been any thought to additional classroom space? There are many competing demands for space within the medical center. To date, classroom space has not been identified as a recurrent or unmet need. As always, if the needs change for our medical center, we will revisit our priorities and investigate opportunities to improve the scheduling of those classrooms.

How will you communicate the strategic plan? Leadership team will communicate with PSL leads and middle management. Perhaps another forum.

How do you plan to increase communication to staff and supervisors? No formal plan at this time but senior management is making this a priority.

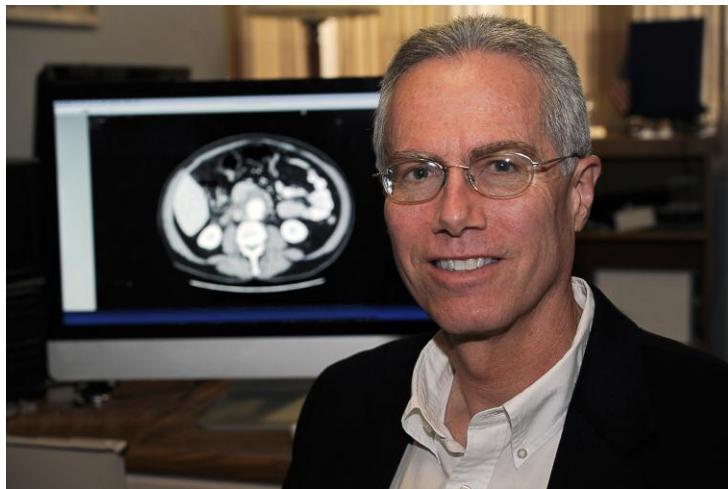
Who is moving to Building 9? Center for Chronic Disease Outcomes Research

Minneapolis VA Enrolls 4,600 in Historic Study



The Minneapolis VA has contributed the second largest number of participants in the VA's largest research study in history. The Million Veteran Program, or MVP, was launched in 2011. It expects to have enrolled up to a million Veterans within the next five years. Last month, MVP hit the 100,000 milestone, with 4617 entered at the Minneapolis VA to date. MVP already tops the enrollment of any single VA study or research program in the past.

MVP aims to build a huge database of health, military, and genetic information. The goal is to help researchers learn more about how genes impact health. Health information and DNA samples collected through MVP are stored securely and made available to authorized researchers. VA has put tight safeguards in place to protect Veterans' personal information. As researchers delve into MVP data over the coming years, they will look for insights into new treatments and preventive measures. They will also seek to learn how to use genetic tests to predict which patients will respond best to which therapies.



VA Study: Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm Repair Methods Prove Equal Over Time

Endovascular and open repair of abdominal aortic aneurysm resulted in similar long-term survival rates, according to a study by VA researchers in the Nov. 22 issue of *The New England Journal of Medicine*. **Dr. Frank Lederle** (left) of Minneapolis VA and colleagues report the long-term results of the Open versus Endovascular Repair (OVER) Veterans Affairs Cooperative Study. The

randomized study included 881 patients aged 49 years or over who experienced asymptomatic abdominal aortic aneurysms and were eligible for either endovascular repair (n=444) or open repair (n=437). All participants were followed up for 9 years. Overall, 146 all-cause deaths occurred in each group, at a hazard ratio (HR) of 0.97 for the endovascular versus open repair group. There was a sustained reduction in all-cause mortality at 2 years, at a HR of 0.63, and at 3 years, at a HR of 0.72, but not thereafter. "Our results suggest that endovascular repair continues to improve and is now an acceptable alternative to open repair even when judged in terms of long-term survival," write the authors.



Dr. Drekonja

Minneapolis VA Researcher's UTI Study of 33,000 Male Veterans

Dr. Dimitri Drekonja, M.D., M.S., of the Minneapolis VA and colleagues reported in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* Dec. 4 in an article titled: "Longer Treatment for Male Urinary Tract Infection Not Associated with Reduced Early or Late Recurrence Risk." The study of more than 33,000 outpatient male veterans suggests that a longer duration of antimicrobial treatment of more than seven days for a urinary tract infection (UTI) appeared not to be associated with a reduced risk of early or late recurrence compared to a shorter duration (seven days or less) of treatment. Researchers suggest their findings "question the role" of longer-duration treatment for male UTI in the outpatient setting.

Milestones – Congratulations!

45 YEARS Lucious Kears Nursing Service Barbara J. Brehmer Mental/Behavioral Health	John C. Brunzell Environmental Health Beatrice A. Platzer Extended Care Sandra L. Sauer Path & Lab	Debra A. Winter Pharmacy Jean C. Benci Extended Care	Sharon E. Jones Mental Behavioral Health Vicki A. Casey Mental/Behavioral Health	Jeanette I. Harris Mental/Behavioral Health Sarah J. Hurley VISN Director's Office
40 YEARS Jerome M. Manders Facilities Engineering Robert P. Buda EHS Carol L. Carlson Path & Lab Robert J. Dejdar Mental/Behavioral Health	20 YEARS Thomas E. Wolf Business Programs Sandra Pina Frizelle Research Service Jacqueline S Bailey Specialty Care Ann M. Bolan Human Resources	Tacy A. Meyeraan Extended Care Christine E. Hoff Primary Care Darcy J. States Primary Care Michelle L. Johnson Primary Care Eugene M. Farrell Primary Care	Nicole D Tabbert Office of the Director Kristin L. Lewis Primary Care Russell V. Norsten Primary Care Shelly J Hughes Primary Care Siamak Noorbaloochi Research Service	Michael J. Bowman Path & Lab Matthew R. Lewis. Path & Lab Steven R. Fenske Police Melanie V. Michael Primary Care Grace Z. Ulven Primary Care
35 YEARS Gary R. Zielke Pharmacy 30 YEARS Fred E. Conrad Medical Administration Renetia J. Jackson Business Programs Cynthia P. Williams Business Programs Nancy M. Tabaka Research Service Sharon L. Marcotte Specialty Care	Judy E. Shuneson Business Programs Henry A. Ruetz Path & Lab William A. Selchow Primary Care Tracy G. Goetz Imaging Service Thordis C. Jennings Specialty Care Cindy A. Moore Specialty Care	Michael J. Phelps Biomedical Joseph G. Lynch Specialty Care Robert B. Chandler Specialty Care Jessica Staples Research Service	Janine M. Kuiper VCS Fuqua, Jeffrey T. Specialty Care Maupuana Skeen Specialty Care Angela L. Johnston Specialty Care	Amy D. Kelly Primary Care Wendy L. Knudson Primary Care Teresita A. Hanson VCS Jessica L. Pearson Specialty Care
25 YEARS Harper Williams EHS Daniel R Shogren Path & Lab Nancy K. Eggert Primary Care Vickie L. Johnson Human Resources	15 YEARS Matthew Bache AMMS. Maria R. Sturgell Education Michael Edward Lein Facilities Engineering Lucy I. Hastings Primary Care	10 YEARS Queen E. Eke Business Programs Patricia L. Hanson Business Programs Gordon Hofman Extended Care Andrew Z. Meyer Readjustment Counseling	Elizabeth A. Grier Specialty Care Jennifer A. Zenker Pharmacy Service Anthony L. Gilles Pharmacy Kevin D. Burns Pharmacy James M. Steinke Environmental Health David K. Labeause Facilities Engineering	Lori A. Ruhr Specialty Care Diana J. Burgess Research Service

Around the Medical Center



American Legion Auxiliary held its 81st annual Holiday Gift Shop for the inpatients of the Minneapolis VA Medical Center Dec. 3-4. Led by Mary Ann Davis, the ladies provided a wide variety of gifts. Each Veteran was allowed to pick out a gift for themselves and another for a loved one, both at no cost to the veteran. Top left photo,(L-R): Mary Ann Davis, American Legion Auxiliary Hospital Representative, Betty Kiser and Donna Miller. Right photo (L-R): Mary French, Lee Hubler, and Donna Miller.

VA Officers Respond to Cardiac Arrest at Fisher House, Resuscitate Patient Until Medics Arrive

On Nov. 7, Minneapolis VA Police Officers Jeremiah Wickenhauser and Phil Clark responded to a cardiac arrest at the Fisher House. They successfully resuscitated the individual until St. Paul paramedics arrived and transported the patient to the Emergency Department. The officers were recently honored by Minneapolis VA leadership.



U.S. Marine Kyle Anderson introduces his video, "I Never Quit," before a packed medical center auditorium on Oct. 10. The video traces his story from childhood through high school (winning state wrestling tournament), basic training, combat, and recovery from injuries.



VA Psychologist Fifth in Age Group In NC Ironman Race

VA psychologist Wayne Siegel finished fifth in his age group and 101st overall among 650 participants in the Oct 20 "Beach to Battleship Ironman Race" in Wilmington, NC, on October 20. He completed the 2.4 mile swim, 112 mile bike, and 26.2 mile run in 11:35:30.